

VZCZCXRO1562
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSI #2789/01 3121416
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 081416Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8145
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002789

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CARC AND EUR/FO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/08/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [CFE](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER BEZHUASHVILI ON
POLITICAL SITUATION, CFE

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, reason 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a meeting on November 8, Georgian Foreign Minister Gela Bezhuashvili said that the government has decided not to go for parliamentary approval of the full 15 day state of emergency if there are no incidents during the next two days, thereby letting it lapse. It will also start negotiations with the opposition on all four of their demands including the date for parliamentary elections. Speaker of Parliament Nino Burjanadze would start the negotiations and later President Saakashvili would directly participate. Bezhuashvili said that Georgia does not need international mediation but could solve its own problems. He said the government had decided to arrest Shalva Natelashvili and Konstantine Gamsakhurdia but not other opposition leaders, because the those two are the main beneficiaries of Russian money and were ringleaders in what the Georgians believe was a planned plot to use the November 2 demonstration as a means of overthrowing the government. A final decision has not been taken on Imedi Television. Bezhuashvili said the Ministry of Interior wants to investigate the finances of the station, and its relationship with Standard Bank, owned by Badri Patarkatsishvili. He is trying to contact NewsCorp, the American company that is a part owner of Imedi. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador underscored with Bezhuashvili the points delivered to the Foreign Minister by A/S Fried in a telcon on November 7. Bezhuashvili told the Ambassador that he had participated in a late night meeting with President Saakashvili to discuss the way ahead from the current political situation in Georgia, after A/S Fried's call and another call from Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt. He said that he understands the message Fried was trying to deliver but the government stands by its decision to declare a state of emergency and close Imedi television.

¶3. (C) Bezhuashvili explained that the state of emergency applies to the entire country. However, it involves suspension of only three freedoms in the constitution, the rights to strike, to hold demonstrations and to disseminate information. All else, he said, remains the same as before the declaration of the emergency. Some in the government had advocated a stricter regime and arrests of opposition leaders. As it is, he said, legal cases will be opened against Shalva Natelashvili and Konstantine Gamsakhurdia. Both these men have likely fled the country, leaving via Tskhinvali in South Ossetia. Bezhuashvili confirmed that

SIPDIS

Koba Davitashvili is not dead or seriously injured. (Note: Davitashvili was seen leaving the hospital in Gori after being treated for injuries suffered during the demonstrations.)

14. (C) Bezhuashvili insisted that the country was facing an "existential threat" before the crackdown, but that the situation on the streets is now fully under the government's control. He said that two armed groups were ready to attack on the evening of November 6, as part of a well-planned attempt at violent regime change. Bezhuashvili conceded that the forcible dispersal of the demonstrations had damaged the Saakashvili government, but that the alternative was much worse. The government acted legitimately, he said. The state of emergency was announced to last for 15 days, but he hopes that the situation will have returned so close to normal that the emergency can be lifted within two days, before the Parliament must vote on its continuation.

15. (C) Imedi will likely remain closed, Bezhuashvili said, because of the danger the station will initiate a new round of unrest. Its finances will be closely checked, as well as its relationship with Standard Bank in Tbilisi, which is owned by Badri Patarkatsishvili and no final decision has been taken. Patarkatsishvili's threat to use all the resources he has to overthrow the government was a clear message that the government had to take action against Imedi, he said. It was a national security issue, in his view. Had the government not acted, he said, it would have been "1992 (i.e. civil war) all over again." He said that he and the government realize the damage to Georgia's reputation caused by closing Imedi. He is looking for a way to contact Rupert Murdoch, the owner of NewsCorp, which is a partner with Patarkatsishvili in Imedi. He thinks Murdoch may not be aware of who his partner in Imedi is and what he has been up to in Georgia.

16. (C) Bezhuashvili said that the missing element in the otherwise well-planned effort against the government was Irakli Okruashvili. The Russians had calculated that the government would not dare to arrest Okruashvili after his sensational charges against the President. Also, the turnout

TBILISI 00002789 002 OF 002

for the November 2 demonstration was not as large as expected, and Bezhuashvili claimed that both Natelashvili and Gamsakhurdia had received calls from Moscow chiding them for not doing better. He said the government has proof that Russian agents were paying demonstrators. He also implicated Goga Khaindrava as a tool of the Russians.

17. (C) Bezhuashvili has instructed his deputy, Nika Vashakidze, to go to Moscow November 9 and deliver a strong message on both the alleged provocation of unrest in Tbilisi and on the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. For now, the GOG will hold off on demanding any changes to the negotiating formats in those conflicts, he said.

18. (C) Bezhuashvili was conciliatory in tone toward other members of the opposition, whom he said were not involved with Patarkatsishvili or the Russians. The government will now begin a renewed dialogue with these moderates, such as Davit Usupashvili and Salome Zourabichvili. All four of the opposition's election-related demands will be on the table, Bezhuashvili said, even the date of elections.

19. (C) Bezhuashvili noted that the Russian Duma ratified the adapted CFE treaty on November 7. He believes this makes the Georgian concerns about the Russian military base at Gudauta moot, and that ratification of the A/CFE will not be a problem in Georgian domestic politics. "Let us know what you need," he said, "and we will be there for you."

TEFFT